



## **News for Immediate Release**

**June 15, 2012**

### **Luzerne County Organizations Awarded Grants from Mericle Settlement**

**Harrisburg** – The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency has approved 17 grants totaling \$2.16 million for programs that will benefit children in Luzerne County.

The funds are available through the outcome of a Luzerne County case involving judicial kickbacks and two for-profit detention centers. Federal court designated PCCD to distribute what has been called “the Mericle money,” named for a cooperating defendant who plead guilty and agreed to pay \$2.15 million in restitution.

“Today’s announcement is bittersweet,” said PCCD Chairman Mark Zimmer. “While I am delighted that so many deserving organizations will receive a financial boost, I am also aware that the money being allocated came from a situation that hurt too many for too long. Hopefully, today’s awards are a step toward helping to heal lives and rebuild faith that justice is served.”

The 17 funded projects were chosen from among 57 proposals. All proposals were reviewed and scored by a panel of professionals working in victims’ services, substance abuse and prevention, family advocacy and juvenile justice, plus one youth who had been involved in the juvenile justice system.

“PCCD received proposals from many worthwhile and deserving Luzerne County organizations,” said PCCD Executive Director Linda Rosenberg. “Unfortunately, there was only so much money. PCCD is investing every penny of the \$2.15 million – plus earned interest – into programs benefitting children living in Luzerne County.”

Rosenberg noted that while the settlement agreement was \$2.15 million, PCCD is allocating a total \$2.16 million, which includes interest earned on the original sum.

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency’s mission is to enhance the quality and coordination of criminal and juvenile justice systems, to facilitate the delivery of services to victims of crime, and to increase the safety of our communities. For more information, visit [www.pccd.state.pa.us](http://www.pccd.state.pa.us).

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**Editor's Note:** A list of grant awards follows:

**Luzerne County Head Start - \$157,472**

Luzerne County Head Start will implement Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), an initiative of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education and Public Welfare, Office of Child Development and Early Learning. PBIS is designed to help young children develop competence in social-emotional skills, equipping Luzerne County children attending Head Start (including those who may be at-risk due to inappropriate and aggressive behavior patterns) to be socially and emotionally ready to transition to kindergarten. Head Start will serve 1,670 children over the two-year grant period. Funding will be used to support staff and related costs to implement the program.

**Valley Youth House Committee - \$180,384**

Valley Youth House Committee, Inc. will serve 18 homeless or at-risk of being homeless youth who are transitioning out of care or services provided by county social service agencies or juvenile probation and parole. Many of these at-risk youth have experienced physical and/or emotional trauma and lack basic life skills such as cooking, maintaining personal hygiene, cleaning a home, doing laundry, as well as buying food and clothing. A case manager will work with youth to reach individual goals that will not only teach basic life skills, but also will identify goals in the area of housing, life skills, education and employment. Funding will support a portion of the salaries and benefits for seven personnel while the bulk of the funds will go to support youth in housing, utilities, food, bus passes and furniture.

**The PA CASA Association - \$178,347**

The PA CASA Association will establish a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in Luzerne County, where independent, trained volunteers advocate for children in dependency court. Advocates monitor one child or group of siblings' case at a time. Funds will be used to establish a satellite office of the non-profit PA CASA Association in Luzerne County.

**Catholic Social Services of the Diocese of Scranton/Big Brothers/Big Sisters - \$179,475**

Over the two-year project, Big Brothers Big Sisters will recruit, screen and train 120-150 volunteers who will be matched with minority youth or youth residing in rural areas of Luzerne County. The children, who will have a history of family dysfunction, often with drug and alcohol-related abuse issues, as well as delinquency, will be placed in one-on-one mentoring relationships. Money will be used to cover the cost of seven staff members and to provide translation services when necessary.

**Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - \$98,641**

The money will be used over a two year period to help develop interpersonal and social skills for 75 youth (ages 8-14) living in two low-income housing neighborhoods in Wilkes-Barre. College students/interns will help students develop interpersonal and social skills including decision-making, self-esteem, communication, personal relationships, anxiety management and assertiveness.

Education sessions will also occur with the children's parents. Funds will be used to employ a full-time coordinator and to reimburse for travel costs for various field trips for youth and summer camp programs.

**Luzerne County Community College - \$180,000**

Luzerne County Community College will partner with the Hazelton Area School District, Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit and Catholic Social Services to serve approximately 118 Hispanic youth in the Greater Hazelton area over a two-year period. The project will also help re-engage students who are either at-risk or who have dropped out of school; implement a new Spanish GED program and offer support services to teenage mothers. The funds will be used for personnel expenses as well as supplies including books and study guides.

**Congregation B'nai B'rith/Dinners for Kids Program - \$88,080**

Funding will help the Dinner for Kids program deliver meals to low income homes with children six days a week. The target population is school-age youth (K-12) enrolled in the Wyoming Valley West School District. This funding expands the number of children who are being served from four communities to an additional 100 children residing in the remaining five communities within the school district. Funds will be used to pay for the meals, the meal containers and the labor to cook each meal, as well as \$1,000 to monitor the impact of the program.

**Jewish Family Service of Greater Wilkes-Barre/Backpacks for Homeless Teen and Children - \$9,825**

The Kids Care Club of Jewish Family Service of Greater Wilkes-Barre will serve a total of 400 youth through its Backpacks for Homeless Teens and Children in Foster Care program. Children entering foster care and shelters often must leave behind personal possessions. The Kids Care Club project has a two-fold impact by engaging children to help prepare and donate backpacks to homeless children. Backpacks will be filled with necessary items and distributed to homeless children. Funds will be used to purchase backpacks and the contents, as well as the project coordinator's expenses.

**Family Service Association of Wyoming Valley - \$118,828**

A licensed clinical social worker will provide 75 children, aged 3 to 18, with free mental health, social services, and/or child protective services. The children to be served have experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, and/or domestic violence, and often suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Individual treatment plans will focus on providing a safe, trusting environment where children and parents can build skills in coping, stress reduction, and managing emotions. Funds will pay for a full-time therapist and partially pay for a program officer.

**Domestic Violence Service Center - \$187,500**

The Domestic Violence Service Center will create a secure outdoor playground, exercise room, on-site play therapy, and extensive counseling/services to benefit children exposed to domestic violence. The center is the only agency in Luzerne County whose primary purpose is to provide short-term emergency shelter and comprehensive services for battered women and their dependent children. DVSC

also provides long-term transitional housing to domestic violence victims as well as other homeless women/children. The playground and exercise room will serve to improve the children's health, general welfare, peer relationships, and pro-social behavior. Therapy and counseling to address mental health and/or trauma-related issues will also be provided. Funds will pay for exercise and playground equipment, fencing, as well as pay for two child advocates and a consultant to administer 100 sessions of play therapy.

**Child Development Council of NEPA/Summer Youth Program - \$176,851**

This program will provide scholarships to 138 school-age children for enrollment in summer youth programs. Children who would not otherwise be able to afford the summer program will be able to participate. The 10-week program includes two meals a day, snacks, activities and projects. Children learn skills to improve math and reading, hear about different occupations and talents. Weekly field trips occur to either a state park or other affordable activities, such as bowling or roller skating. Funds will pay for 10 additional teachers and six assistants during the two-year period, as well as transportation, food, supplies, student insurance and other costs.

**Victims Resource Center- \$138,868**

This project provides for support services to victims of child abuse in Luzerne County including crisis intervention, legal options, court and forensic medical accompaniment, advocacy, individual and group support. Also included is support service to the child/adolescent victims' families. Staff will provide crisis intervention and counseling in the immediate aftermath of a crime or the disclosure of a crime by a child. Funds will be used for one full-time counselor and partial salaries for six additional employees, plus office and counseling supplies, travel and other costs.

**Greater Wilkes-Barre Association for the Blind - \$24,399**

This year-long program will help blind and visually impaired adolescents transition to adulthood by helping participants explore educational opportunities, develop independent living skills and prepare for school-to-work needs. Students will work with staff and mentors in identifying possible career choices. The purpose is to help parents and students set realistic and attainable goals. Funds will be used to support program personnel, as well as necessary costs for transportation, supplies and other costs for participants.

**Wyoming Valley Alcohol and Drug Services, Inc. - \$178,980**

This project provides for substance abuse counseling and family involvement in adolescent substance abuse treatment. It establishes an integrated network of service systems among Luzerne County agencies that can address the needs of probation-involved youth and at-risk juveniles, plus their families.

Every year, about 10 adolescents will be enrolled at the local community college and/or vocational training. The funds will be used for personnel, supplies, travel and operating expenses, as well as tuition.

**Volunteers of America of Pennsylvania, Inc./The Magnolia Project,  
\$172,514**

The Magnolia Project prepares young women to deal with both school-related and non-academic concerns such as low self-esteem, communication, stress, depression and career choices. The program will work with female students (grades 9-12) from the Wilkes-Barre Area School District who have been identified as being at risk of school failure through truancy, academic or social deficiency. Participants will attend weekly support groups with staff and volunteer mentors.

As part of the project, 12 girls will be selected to participate in a Leadership Council. Students will participate in a week-long leadership training program. Funds will be used for personnel, supplies, travel and other costs.

**Boys and Girls Clubs of Northeastern PA/After School and Summer Day  
Camp - \$81,102**

The After School and Summer Day Camp Programs works with children aged 6 to 18 who live in low-income housing in Luzerne County. Both programs focus on character development, education, arts, recreation, and health and life skills. The after-school component includes food, tutoring, recreational activities, and programs to address drug and alcohol prevention, anti-violence and other safety precautions.

The summer program includes recreational programs, including two weeks at the Jewish Community Center Summer Camp. Funds will be used for personnel, supplies, food, transportation and tuition for 30 children to attend the overnight camp and field trips.

**Jewish Community Center of Wyoming Valley - \$9,800**

The Jewish Community Center will provide a wellness/fitness component to their 2012 summer day camp, where at-risk children and adolescents can choose to change their body composition through exercise, diet, and education. This wellness/fitness component is an activity that will be added to the daily curriculum to help combat juvenile obesity. A registered dietician will also be available to provide nutritional counseling, educate participants and their families about proper nutrition and eating behaviors, so that the child may better achieve their weight management goals and maintain good health. Funds will be used to retain a registered dietician, certified professional trainer and facilitator. Supplies such as marketing materials and exercise equipment will also be purchased.

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